

The Orangeburg News.

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VOLUME 7.

SATURDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 18, 1873.

NUMER 38

THE ORANGEBURG NEWS

PUBLISHED AT
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BY THE
ORANGEBURG NEWS COMPANY

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Jan 11

[From the Williamsburg Republican.]

WAYSIDE SKETCHES.

TRAVELLING IN THE SWAMPS

BY OUR CHERAW CORRESPONDENT.

It is but a few days since the great

balloon collapsed and came to grief.

The thing was not well broken to har-

ness, and, as many people expected, it

kicked over the traces, smashed the

vehicle behind it, scattered the by-

standers, and mixed things up generally;

a consummation rather inglorious, per-

haps, but doubtless very comforting and

soothing to the feelings of the proposed

navigators and their families—that is, if

they are of my mind; for, setting aside

the perils of the upper air, the chances

of paying an unwelcome visit to the

moon, or of running aground on the dog-

star, they escaped the still greater

dangers lying in wait in the great

waters below.

If there is one of the elements for

which the writer has unqualified con-

tempt, and which he scrupulously keeps

clear of on all possible occasions, it is

that deceitful medium which the school

book tells us is made up of "two of

hydrogen and one of oxygen." Never,

since that fatal truth was impressed

forcibly on his youthful understanding

and freely illustrated by the vigorous

action of a piece of leather two feet

long, making him revolve rapidly on

his own axis round the school room

until the subject was clear from all ob-

scure, and a beautiful glow of scientific

ardor took possession of his soul—never

has he hankered very much after water.

Good Templars will please understand

that I am in nowise "responsible" in

this unburthening my feelings, and they

must, in every case, seek "satisfaction"

from the editor of this paper only.

Having settled that point, I am free to

declare that my view of water in the

abstract is that of an element calculated

specially to terrify unfortunate little

boys with chronic dirty faces, and hav-

ing the evil property of adulterating

milk in cities and spoiling good whisky

everywhere. But of all the manifold

forms in which water can present itself

to the discomfort of a dweller on dry

land, preserve me from ever again

encountering it in the Pee Dee swamps.

"Take any shape but that, and my firm

nerve

"Shall never tremble!"

Now, I am not very easily scared in

general. I have gone through railroad

smashes and been run away with by

misguided brutes called horses; I have

tumbled down trees and tried falling

from the roofs of houses, both inside and

out; I have seen ghosts and been chased

by bull-dogs; and I still live—live to

chronicle an experience worse than all

these combined. But to my tale.

About a week ago it was my ill fortune

to set out with Col. Harris, of Kingstree,

on a disastrous journey, whose end and

aim was Conwayboro. Surely, the

"ministers who wait on Nature's

mischiefs" guided our way, after numer-

ous small incidents and adventures, to

that ill-omened part of the Pee Dee

swamps, near which, as we were deluded

into believing, is situated Gallivant's

ferry. And there may be a ferry there;

far be it from me to say there isn't; for

worthy and responsible people have

asserted the fact. All I will say is that

we tried to find that ferry; we searched

diligently and gave our minds to it, but

had to come away in a demoralized con-

dition, without getting within several

miles of that ferry, so far as we could

judge. We didn't find it that day, and

what is more, we don't much care if we

never do.

I should say that our journey went

on swimmingly until we struck the Pee

Dee swamp, and much more so before

tion to come into the buggy with us,

out of the wet. Harris wore a very

grave face, and speculated as to the

possibility of suing somebody or other

for damages; but rallying a little he

whipped up our retrospective "animal

and urged him forward until we got

into deep water and an ugly predicam-

ent at the same time. A sudden turn

brought us close on to the river; a

strong current caught the vehicle; the

horse plunged into a hole and took to

swimming; the water rushed into the

buggy with a gurgle and a great splash-

ing; two pairs of legs appeared simul-

taneously in mid-air over the dash-

board; two valves filled with water, and

one stout individual of the party—not

myself—lay back in his seat and re-

peated in an undertone a string of long

words which I never remember to have

met with in any dictionary or spelling

book. More whipping for that miser-

able horse, more kicking and plunging,

another influx of water, and we came

finally to anchor. It was a cheerful

prospect on all sides; nobody could

deny that. A river on the left, a thick-

et on the right, another river where the

road ought to have been, and no room

to turn round in or do anything but go

straight ahead. To the two voyagers,

sitting in a remarkably easy position,

with their lower extremities elevated at

an angle of forty-five degrees, all this

was highly exhilarating.

For the first time in his life, as I

believe, Harris made an effort, at this

juncture, to quote poetry—a sure sign

that something was preying on his mind

"Water, water everywhere,

And not a drop to drink,"

he muttered, gloomily.

"What's the matter, Harris?" in-

quired.

"Oh, I'm thinking of that whisky

that I——has upstairs," he replied.

"We might have brought some," for

medical purposes," you know; and here

we are without a drop. A fine oppor-

tunity just thrown away."

Waiting till his grief grew somewhat

calmer, we resolved ourselves into a

"committee of ways and means," but

found the way decidedly easier than the

means. After holding council, however,

I was told off for active service, while

Harris constituted himself a reserve

party, and remained in the buggy. I

stripped off my clothes and committed

myself to that treacherous stream, alter-

nately wading and swimming for a quar-

ter of a mile ahead, to reconnoitre. At

that point I thought it well to ascend

a tree, by way of going to the mast-head,

and to "look out for a sail." Did any

reader of this every try to climb a tree

without that covering which the shallow

conventionalities of society insist that

man shall wear, and robed only in his

own innocence? If not, let him take

the advice of one who has done and

suffered much, and let him never

attempt it. I will not harrow any one's

feelings with the details. I don't intend

to speak of the scraping on the bark of

that tree every time I slipped (which

was pretty often), or of that deceitful

bough which snapped off and let me

down into the water with a suddenness

I hate to recall, or of the thorns which

enlivened my downward progress. I

will only distantly allude to the plaster

and ointment which I have been

purchasing at intervals ever since that

day. After stating that I shall never

again look on a gum tree without a

shudder, I will draw a veil over the

scene forever.

On my return to Harris, his face

wore a look of solemn abstraction, and

his lips were moving inaudibly. It was

only after repeated questions from me

that he looked me sadly in the face and

a large sized man—"a good portly man,

i' faith"—in a state of nature (excepting

as regards a straw hat and a meerschaum

pipe), wading in five feet of water, beside

a plunging horse, holding the reins in

one hand and a whip in the other, and

you will see Harris as he appeared on

that eventful day. We turned that

buggy round in the water, and we

turned the horse too, one being nearly as

difficult to manage as the other. But

we did turn them, and set out bravely

for the shore, a mile and a half away.

Our perils, however, were not ended—

not by any means. In one place, the

horse, plunging vigorously, set his foot

in an impressive manner, on Harris's

corns, causing him to perform many

surprising feats in the water, of which

I didn't believe him capable, and pretty

often the affinity of twisted roots for our

feet had an equally lively effect on our

movements. But worse, alas! was to

come. A treacherous branch of a tree

was lying in the way; it became entan-

gled in the wheel on Harris's side; it

revolved with the said wheel under

water, and in due course of time it

caught that devoted officer just behind

his knee, and caused him to revolve

likewise. Turning my head round at

that moment, I saw my friend describing

an arc of a circle, till, "with his face

turned to the skies," he disappeared,

with a mighty splash. The horse was

stopped, and a rescue attempted; but

before I reached the spot Harris emerg-

ed, still alive, although a floating hat, an

extinguished pipe, and a volley of un-

scriptural observations attested the